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ABSTRACT

Teacher education programs inadequately prepare teachers to teach students to participate in the many forms of cooperation which are inherent in life. Although teachers have the responsibility of helping students learn how to live and be productive in social groups, students in colleges of education are not usually trained to oversee and grade groups. Sometimes student teachers, during their course work, are put into groups to work on class assignments. However, when all student teachers working in a group are given the same individual grades, or given different individual grades on the basis of their non-group activity, the work of the group is not being properly graded. As a result, student teachers are not learning to use groups in their own classrooms. When professors assign college students group projects, they are often reluctant to apply grading policies which recognize the different contributions of different members, and so everyone is given the same grade. Many able, grade-oriented education students who have such experiences become "anti-group" because they feel they were victimized by others in the group who contributed little to the endeavor. Examples are presented for developing flexible groups that allow students to learn how to deal with confrontations and differences tactfully. Suggestions for ways to grade the final group and its work are also made. (JD)

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TEACHING ABOUT COOPERATION

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Teaching About Cooperation

It is practically trite for college of education to be charged with conducting poor programs of teacher preparation. And oftentimes, such charges are misdirected. But there is one criticism which can usually be fairly leveled, and made to stick: the training of teachers leaves them inadequately prepared to teach students how to participate in the many forms of cooperation which are inherent in life. Furthermore, this poor preparation makes teachers less competent to effectively participate as members of a school community.

The importance of teaching elementary and secondary students about cooperation--and how to engage in it--is receiving increasing attention at this time. The Center for the Study of Schools, connected with John Hopkins University, has designed and tested a variety of simulations, which can be used in classrooms both to teach subject matter, such as math, and at the same time, improve student's cooperative skills, through their focus on carefully designed group projects.[1] Similarly, the Center for Cooperative Learning, at the College of Education of the University of Minnesota, has devised a variety of means to carry out in-class activities.[2] There is also the comparatively new International Society for the Study of Cooperation in Education.[3]

Learning in Groups

Most readers recognize that a focus on student group activities was an important part of the Progressive Education Movement, and this focus is still common in many schools and classes at this time. However, it is important to recognize that reflexsively putting students into groups to

carry-out assignments is not automatically a good thing. There are groups (that are good) and there are groups (that are bad). The research work referred to above represents a comparatively rigorous effort to identify the characteristics of effective students groups, and design techniques which will permit teachers to efficiently use groups in their classes. The evaluations of these projects show that groups can be designed and maintained which assist the learning of cooperative skills and which enhance cognitive learning--even in racially integrated classrooms.

In considering the virtues of student groups activities, it is important to place such concerns into a larger framework. There is a growing recognition of the importance of schools as socializing institutions.[4] This recognition is reflected in increased attention to matters such as student discipline, career education, character and moral education, and citizenship education. These concerns appear to cover a diversity of matters. However, they actually reflect a common theme: how can we educate or socialize students so they responsibly participate in the give-and-take inherent in social life? Thus, a focus on student discipline implies that one part of such give-and-take is the need for people to obey certain rules of conduct. Career education implies that participating in work, and earning a living, are parts of social life. Again, character and moral education stress that good human relationships have certain fundamentally moral elements. Finally, citizenship education emphasizes that citizens must be informed and responsible, so as to be able to participate in communal life

Another common theme to these approaches is that they are implicitly concerned with socialization, as well as cognative learning. Socialization, too, is a form of learning, and can also be deliberately managed by adults--

just like teaching math. However, socialization means that the instructors are more concerned with environmental design and manipulation, as compared with textbooks, lectures, or written tests. Pupils are socialized to desirable conduct and values through being placed in environments which: invite such learning; reward it; provide occasions for practising the learning; offer attractive role models; discourage inappropriate learnings; and otherwise surround the pupils with incentives to learn. None of this is to deny that lectures or books about good conduct are irrelevant to socialization; however, it does mean that, without environmental manipulation, appropriate lectures and books will have small effect on conduct.

One important mode of environmental manipulation routinely applied in schools and classrooms are the policies we follow in assigning academic work to students. These activities--tests, desk assignments, written drills, homework, oral presentations--are the essence of the students "work" in school. The nature of most student work contrasts sharply with work assignments given in most adult activities. The contrast is not that student work is easy, and adult work hard--the assignments for more mature students can sometimes be more intellectually complex than the work of some adults. The contrast arises because, in most adult workplaces, individuals work cooperatively in producing their work products. Automobiles are assembled by groups of workers. When our clothes are dry cleaned, they pass through the hands of a number of workers who each handle a part of the process. While I may say I "wrote this article you are now reading," my statement is an oversimplification. In order to have the article accepted and printed, I had to deal with (either face-to-face, or by mail or phone), with a typist, and editor, and an assistant editor. This process of cooperation might also involve some of my colleagues (who could comment on my draft), my students

(on whom I tried out my ideas in lectures), and perhaps several editors (if the article was sucessively submitted to several different publishers). Most forms of adult work require relatively high levels of cooperation. Of course, not all cooperation is "fun"--for instance, I don't enjoy receiving letters from editors rejecting my articles, even though the letters are usually polite. But if I want to be published, I have to be able to grin and bear such rejections, and recognize that the editor who rejects me today may tomorrow accept a different submission of mine. Furthermore, even when I am rejected, I have to carefully read rejection letters, to see if they contain suggestions about how my submission can be improved, or whether there is a more appropriate publication to submit my work. Thus, in real life, cooperation can occur simultaneously with disappointment and partial rejection. However, we have to learn how to listen for such help.

In contrast to such adult patterns, pupils are typically told to "do their own work!" Cooperation is essentially only between the teacher and each individual pupil, who tries to produce work satisfactory to the teacher. This is a simplified, and really unusual, form of cooperation. On the other hand, adult cooperation often involves a variety of cooperators; some times these persons cooperate simultaneoulsy, and some times they work on a common product one after another. Another unusual element to pupil/teacher cooperation in school is that the relationship between these two cooperators is much less intense than is typical in adult work: I will feel quite upset if my typist does a poor job on this manuscript, of if the editor rejects my submission. Of course, I may be mature enough to control my frustration, but self-control is inherent in the cooperative process. If people are working on some important project, high levels of emotional control are needed. Conversely,

in a school situation, while teachers want the pupils to do well, teachers rarely care (about a pupil's paper) as much as I do about the typist's or editor's actions. Thus, the potential for tensions between teachers and pupils are diminished, and there is less pressure on the student to learn self-control. In contrast, a frequent problem young people have in getting introduced to paid employment is accepting the authority of supervisors; this only means these beginners are unaccustomed to working with people who care intensely (in contrast to teachers) about the quality of their work. This caring by the supervisor may seem intrusive and authotarian to young employees. But it often is only a form of cooperation. To the good supervisor, it is very important that the job be done well and, as a result, they will pressure employees to display appropriate skills and attitudes, e.g., come in regularly and on time, dress properly, be polite, keep busy. While most teachers want equivalent conduct from their pupils, they often have neither the time, resources, nor (sometimes) the backing to urgently press such demands.

Difficulties with Group Assignments

To reiterate: when teachers assign students to work individually, they create a classroom climate which contrasts with typical work environments. Some educators may contend that this process of individual assignment is justified by the comparative immaturity of many students--who can't handle the ambiguity inherent in complex cooperation. This justification may seem plausible, until we recognize that pre-school and kindergarten classes often use group projects, while the pattern of individualistic assignment may prevail from first grade up through graduate school. Of course, the complexity of particular group assignments must always be related to students' developmental limitations but, from the practices usually followed, the preva-

lence of individual assignments in classrooms seems to be more due to reflex habit than deliberate reflection.

Another criticism of group assignments can be more properly argued. Group assignments do not automatically lead to good student work nor appropriate socialization. Just as there are skills involved in designing tests, developing curriculum, or assigning desk work, so too it takes skills for teachers to plan and manage groups. For instance, some system must be devised, by teachers who give group assignments, to oversee and grade such assignments.

In working (in typical teaching) with an individual student, the teacher needs to only be conscious of the interrelationship between the student's motivation and knowledge and the teacher. In overseeing a group project, the teacher also has to be conscious of both (a) the interrelationship among students, as a group, and (b) the relationship between each individual group member and the teacher. Speaking concretely, students have to be taught or advised how to relate to other group members. The advice can be explicit, "You should tell John such-and-such," or general, "Here's how you should act toward other group members," or given through role modeling, i.e., the teacher acts in a particular way, and implies that group members should act similarly towards each-other. But, before such advice can be given, the teacher must have some ideas about how group members should act, and why those ideas are correct. For example, students may be reluctant to offer other group members academic help, since such an offer may be seen as intrusion (and, in the typical class environment, such an offer may actually be intrusive).

However, in a group activity, such an offer is usually appropriate: the "offerer" should not be reluctant to offer to help and the "offeree" should not be embarassed to admit that he needs help. And so teachers working with groups have to help students learn tactful ways of offering and receiving help within the group.

Grading is another problem area. Once, a high school student talked to me about a project he was assigned in class. In the discussion, I mentioned some sources he could use to improve his paper. He thanked me for my suggestion, then went on to say that, "I don't need to worry about working hard on this, since it is a group assignment anyway!" We can all figure out what this frank answer implied. The student knew that his group included one or two highly motivated students and that, if he did not apply himself, these motivated students, to maintain their good academic records, would do extra work to cover up his slack. Or, possibly, the student meant that group members would be graded for their good work on the basis of their earned grades for other, individual work. And so, even if they did a poor job as a group (or, possibly, even a good job), their pre-existing individual grades would prevail. In any case, we can recognize that poor teacher supervision and ill-considered grading policies can make student group assignment a counterproductive activity.

Some objector may wonder why teachers should learn how to overcome the problems inherent in overseeing groups and assigning grades--since group work by students is not an appropriate teacher responsibility in any case. And, at this point, we must return to one of my opening themes: the increasing concern, in education, about issues of socialization. This concern is developing just because education, in the immediate past, has given insufficient attention to constructive student socialization. This oversight has generated

external and internal pressures which deserve a serious response. Such a response should and will require us to reconsider some of our definitions as to what are "appropriate teacher responsibilities." Obviously, I am contending that teachers, and the administrators who supervise them, are responsible for helping students learn how to live, and be productive, in social groups. Indeed, not only do teachers and administrators share this responsibility; it also partly is a responsibility for the institutions which train teachers. This reference to teacher training leads to a main theme of this article.

Deficiencies in Teacher Training

Students in colleges of education are not typically trained to oversee and grade groups A consideration of these current flaws can be of use to both faculty in colleges of education, and to teachers and administrators in elementray and secondary education (who want to improve their understanding of how to teach cooperation to their students).

Sometimes student teachers, during their course-work, are put in to groups to do assignments. However, the grading systems used are usually not appropriate. And here is a matter that bears reiteration. When all students working in a group are reflexisively given the same individual grades, or given different individual grades on the basis of their non-group assignments, the work of the group is not being properly graded. As a result, students are not learning how to use groups in their own classes. But, from my talks with hundreds of students who I have handled in teaching my courses, I know that the foregoing grading patterns are routinely "taught" to teachers in training by their instructors--since the instructors use them in their own classes.

There is one other grading system sometimes used which is marginally better, though inappropriate with college students. The teacher can try and

observe the conduct and contributions of all group members, and assign different individual grades on the basis of his observations. The trouble is that much serious group work must occur out of sight of the teacher, when the group meets away from class to actually practice working on their own--just as students are assigned homework to learn how to work away from the class. The teacher cannot be accurately informed about what happens away from class. Of course, informed guesses can be made about who did how much work, but it becomes akward basing real grades on such speculation. In addition, a group may properly decide to assign different responsibilities to members, so some members actually write, others collect data and reference material, and still others do final typing. Such divisions may reveal substantial levels of cooperative skills among the group members. But when these divisions occur, it is harder for outsiders to allocate individual credit for the final product.

If my criticisms are justified, one may wonder why incorrect practices are so often followed. There are several reasons which deserve consideration. First, while there is a substantial traditional literature about the value of using student groups in classes, much of this literature is actually very vague about how recognition and rewards are to be distributed. There are often only vague references to natural and intrinsic rewards--as if a classroom was a replication of a family working together on a farm.[5] This perspective is oversimplistic. The classroom is an artificial entity--the outcome of decisions and policies formed in a particular institution at a specific time in history, the policies applied to class groups must be integrated into those realities. Groups may work on family farms without deliberate grading policies--though I still assume they had problems with shirkers and students. Essentially, a school is simulation of what may happen to students later in life; efforts to

improve practices cannot simply aim to make schools or classrooms more "natural", but must create new simulations. A reflexsive reliance on naturalness may actually generate counter-productive changes. In one sense, simulations must be unnatural; deliberate thought is usually necessary to improve them. Second, some of the group oversight and grading policies just criticized are less disruptive when applied with younger children. Such children will typically do all of their group work in class, in the sight of the teacher. They can be motivated without as much reference to formal grades. The problem arises when older students, in college or departmentalized schools, are provided with the forms of oversight and incentives which might be appropriate with second graders. Thus, in a college where you have to maintain a certain average to stay enrolled, and where students are burdened with part-time jobs, and full class schedules, students are naturally interested in the relationship between their class assignments and grades. Third, improper grading practices sometimes "work" because the cooperative demands on students--even in group projects--are often quite low. For example, many pre-packaged group projects or simulations are only 3 - 4 hour activities. Such exercises can be useful. However, they are poor reflections of adult work situations, where people may be expected to continue cooperating over months and years. The pedagogical challenge, and need, is to design grading structures which can be realistically applied, for instance, throughout an entire course. A final cause for the current situation is that many educators, as we all recognize, are highly nuturant persons. As a result, they tend to be critical to the potentially divisive effects of competition and the pursuit of excellence. And many of these nuturant types are sympathetic to collective student assignments, since mutual support is inherent in healthy group life. The only trouble is that, when such educators assign college

students group projects, they are reluctant to apply grading policies which recognize the differential contribution of different members. And so everyone is given the same grade. This leads to an ironic effect. Many able, grade-oriented education students whom I see, who have had such expe-riences, have actually become anti-group, because they feel they were victimized by other free-loading students. The last thing they want is another group project. In effect, they have been socialized into being anti-social. They believe the social environments they were put into were unfair to them. (Of course, some poorer students found some gratification in their equivalent experiences, but what they "learned" was that freeloading can pay; this is hardly a desireable lesson.)

Some Correctives

Now that this elaborate criticism has been levelled, it is time to propose some correctives. To make this presentation more concrete, much of the suceeding discussion will be based on the particular simulation I use with the own undergrad and grad students. Other effective simulations might also be applied, and I am sure mine can be further improved. But I believe that effective simulations, while they may vary in form, should apply the principles I have been describing.

The proportion of group assignments given in colleges of education-- at the undergraduate and graduate levels--should increase. The subject matters of such assignments can be diverse. Indeed, the use of group projects can increase the flexibility of assignments, since more complex and lengthy assignments can be given. In my classes, for instance, groups of students have done descriptions of schools (some ranging 20-50 pages in length), plus appendices and diagrams, developed proposed sets of written school rules and procedures, and prepared book reports comparing and contrasting four to six books.

Students should be appropriately supervised and taught (about working in groups) during their assignments. My students are typically given two separate group projects during one term. The first counts for about 20% of the grade, and serves as a test effort, so they see what each-other's problems and strengths are, and can more carefully plan their final effort. About a third to a half of each group's collective work is during class time, so groups can be observed in action. Due to such observations, appropriate suggestions can be made as to work substance, and how to manage problems in intergroup relations. I give students my home and office phone number, so they may contact me if they feel it is necessary--though they are usually inclined to do too much on their own, as compared to appropriately seeking advice.

In making assignments, students are randomly assigned into groups of three to six students. Students must stay with their groups for one class period, and they then can shift to any other group that will take them. They are kept together for at least a period to prevent pre-existing cliques (or ethnic groupings) from coming into play. After one period, interpersonal ties develop in each group, and discourage promiscious drifting. But the right to shift is critical. It can happen that the "true workers" are a minority in a group. In such a case, they may become an exploited minority. The workers protection is their right to go to any other group which will take them. And, if they are workers, they can probably find takers, if they don't wait until the last week of the course. Often, such exploited workers do not shift when they have a right to--really because they are afraid of confrontation--but that is a learning outcome of the course. In adult life, one reason groups are stimulated to stay humane is the fact they people may leave them if they

are too unpleasant. But leaving takes courage and initiative. In the simulation I use, students can take such initiative--or fail to take it--at a moderate risk. (I remember one student who complained that he was exploited by other group members, who got their grades off his work. I asked him why he didn't transfer to another group. He answered that his peers would have gotten mad at him if he did. The other members were two seventeen year old girls, each about 5'6" in height. He was twenty, and 6'3". I said "Did you fear they would beat you up?" He said, "Of course not! They would just not like me." I asked "Do you like them?" He said "No!" "Then, why do you want their approval?" When I ran into this student about two years later, we exchanged friendly hellos; he said to me that, since my class, he has become much more assertive in protecting his rights. He sounded pleased with himself.)

Class lectures, in addition to covering my formal subject area, treat with learning interpersonal skills, such as how to tactfully manage confrontations; how planning a group product differs from individual student work planning; how to ask for and give help; the importance of keeping attendance at group meetings, and holding members to promptness; and why leaving an unsatisfactory group is sometimes part of cooperation. Sometimes the advice is followed, and sometimes it is not. But, even if it is not, students, at the end of the term, are often honest enough to see that their reluctance to follow particular advice was partly due to their own lack of interpersonal skills. Furthermore, because they were warned (by the instructor), it is hard for them to turn the teacher into their scapegoat--they were not misadvised; they refused correct advice. This direct recognition of error probably facilitates learning. After final graded papers are returned, an effort should be made to debrief individual students and some groups. This naturally leads to the question

of grading policy itself.

Grading Mechanics

Each paper is graded in toto. The length and appropriate elaboration is determined by the general assignment and the number of group members. Larger groups must do longer papers. Grades are based on the length of the paper, clarity of description and analysis, appropriate prose quality, complexity, and so on, just as any student paper. The grade is stated in numerical terms: "A" can be four, "B" three; and usually intermediate grades, such as 3.6 are given. The students on each team subdivide the grade among group members by majority vote: if the paper earns a "B" they may simply give all group members "B"s; they may give one group an "A", another a "B", and another a "C". In other words, the teacher's grade determines the size of the grade "pie" available, and the group has the power to decide how to slice the pie.

Students must state their grade division when the paper is turned in for its final grade, and at least a majority of the group must sign to acceptance of the division. The division is stated in percentage terms. In a four member group, an even division would be 25%, 25%, 25%, and 25%. An uneven division could be 30%, 23.33%, 23.33%, and 23.33%. About three quarters of my groups divide their grades up evenly. It is my estimate that only half of them should do so; the other quarter of even divisions represents students who did not know how to effectively protect their rights--and who will hopefully be wiser in the future. The situation is like students who do not learn math or spelling. When they do not get good grades, we expect this will stimulate them to do better in the future.

When students receive a grade which is less than they believe they

"deserved"--since it does not reflect all the work they did for the final written project--they are provided with a discourse on the true meaning of their final grades. Their grades do not simply reflect their formal contribution to that paper, but also the quality of their roles as cooperators. And cooperation means not only being a workhorse, or acquiesing to exploitation. It also means judiciously protecting one's own self-interest. Thus, in the simulation, the students who resolutely fail to protect themselves, as well as serve the group, really do deserve their (sometimes) lesser grade. They have not met one of the ultimate tests posed by the course, and that's what their grade means. The course is not only about writing papers to describe schools; it is also a class in how to work with others.

Conclusion

If we want to improve the ways schools socialize students to wholesome adult life, we have to be more conscious of how current school environments structure student interaction. Analysis of this sort will cause us to try and change many of our present forms of student work assignment, and move towards more assignments to student groups. But we cannot simply assume that all forms of student grouping work well. Thus, teachers and administrators must learn how to identify and manage constructive forms of group simulations. A logical means of increasing the learning by teachers and administrators is through changing the forms of assignment and grading in many classes in colleges of education. Conversely, if the current forms of misassignment and grading persist, it will be hard for schools to shift their policies in more wholesome directions.

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2. Patricia A. Roy, ed. The 1982 Handbook, Structuring Cooperative Learning (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota, A Cooperative Network Publication, 1982). See also the many books and articles of David and Robert Johnson on these themes, such as, Joining Together Group Therapy and Group Skills, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975).

3. The Society recently published Sharan, et al, eds., Cooperation in Education (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young Univeristy Press, 1980). Its address is IASCE, 149 McKay Building, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, Utah 85602.

4. For one discussion on the theme of socialization in schools, see Edward A. Wynne, Looking At Schools (lexington, Mass.: Heath/ Lexington, 1980).

5. See, e.g., the discussion about "incidental learning" in John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: Macmillan, 1961) p. 9.

6. For a precise description of my course mechanics, see Edward A. Wynne, Syllabus for Education 170, (Chicago, Ill.: University of Illinois, College of Education, n.d.) mimeo.